



# Faith Development ...in Young People

# FAITH DEVELOPMENT IN YOUNG PEOPLE

## Today we will be exploring...

### **1. Definitions:**

- What do we mean by 'faith'?
- What is the question we are hoping to address today?

### **2. The Theories: How faith develops in young people**

- Stages of a child's development (Piaget, Erikson & Kohlberg)
- Stages of faith development (Westerhoff & Fowler)
- Discussion – Are they right or wrong, how should this impact the way we work?

### **3. The Practicalities: How to develop faith in young people**

- What role can we play
- Age appropriate responses/approaches
- The power of relationship and prayer

### **4. Q&A and sharing your experiences**

Discuss:

# FAITH?

- When we use the term 'faith' in relation to 'faith development' what are we actually describing?
- How much impact does our definition of faith have on the way we engage with young people?
- What are the 'distinguishing features' of faith as opposed to religion, knowledge, or belief and to what extent can we expect to see these features in young people.
- What are waypoints, milestones, and markers for the development we are seeking?
- What are your expectations for this session? What does the session title mean to you?

# THE THEORIES: HOW FAITH DEVELOPS IN YOUNG PEOPLE

## How Humans Develop

Over the past century several prominent sociologists, psychologists and biologists have devised various methods to quantify, chart or even predict the developmental stages of a human being from conception to late adulthood.

There are three pieces of work that stand out...

- Jean William Fritz Piaget's Development Stages (4 Stages)
- Erik Erikson's Childhood and Society 1963 (8 Stages)
- Lawrence Kohlberg's Philosophy of Moral Development 1981 (6 Stages)

# PIAGET'S FOUR COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT STAGES

## Stage

## Characterised by

**Sensori-motor**  
(Birth-2 yrs)

Differentiates self from objects Recognises self as agent of action and begins to act intentionally: e.g. pulls a string to set mobile in motion or shakes a rattle to make a noise  
Achieves object permanence: realises that things continue to exist even when no longer present to their senses.

**Pre-operational**  
(2-7 years)

Learns to use language and to represent objects by images and words Thinking is egocentric: has difficulty assessing the viewpoint of others.  
Classifies objects by a single feature: e.g. groups together all the red blocks regardless of shape or all the square blocks regardless of colour

**Concrete operational**  
(7-11 years)

Can think logically about objects and events .  
Classifies objects according to several features and can order them in series along a single dimension such as size.

**Formal operational**  
(11 years and up)

Can think logically about abstract propositions and test hypotheses systematically. Becomes concerned with the hypothetical, the future, and ideological problems

# ERIK ERIKSON'S CHILDHOOD AND SOCIETY (1963)

Educational psychologist Erik Erikson suggested that psychosocial development, the changing ways we perceive ourselves individually and in relation to society, occurs in eight stages. A person who masters each stage of development is systematically developing character because each mastered stage results in a favourable virtue. Mastery of each successive virtue is dependent upon mastery of the previous.

1. Birth to 18 Months - Trust vs. Mistrust - Hope
2. 18 Months to 3 Years - Autonomy vs. Shame – Right use of Will
3. 3 to 5 Years - Initiative vs. Guilt – Self Confidence
4. 6 to 12 Years - Industry vs. Inferiority - Competence
5. 12 to 18 Years - Identity vs. Role Confusion - Loyalty
6. 18 to 35 - Intimacy and Solidarity vs. Isolation - Commitment
7. 35 to 55 - Productivity vs. Self absorption - Learning
8. 55 to Death - Integrity vs. Despair - Wisdom

# KOHLBERG'S PHILOSOPHY OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

The theory holds that moral reasoning, the basis for ethical behaviour, has six identifiable developmental stages, each more adequate at responding to moral dilemmas than its predecessor.

1. **Pre-Conventional 1. Obedience and punishment orientation** i.e. How can I avoid punishment? At this stage, children see rules as fixed and absolute. Obeying the rules is important because it is a means to avoid punishment.
2. **Pre-Conventional 2. Self-interest orientation** i.e. What's in it for me? Children account for individual points of view and judge actions based on how they serve individual needs. Reciprocity is possible, but only if it serves one's own interests.
3. **Conventional 3. Interpersonal accord and conformity to social norms** - The good boy/good girl attitude. This stage of moral development is focused on living up to social expectations and roles. There is an emphasis on conformity, being "nice," and consideration of how choices influence relationships.
4. **Conventional 4. Authority and social-order maintaining orientation** (Law and order morality). At this stage of moral development, people begin to consider society as a whole when making judgments. The focus is on maintaining law and order by following the rules, doing one's duty, and respecting authority.

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- 5. Post-Conventional 5. Social contract orientation.** Social Contract and Individual Rights . At this stage, people begin to account for the differing values, opinions, and beliefs of other people. Rules of law are important for maintaining a society, but members of the society should agree upon these standards.
- 6. Post-Conventional 6. Universal ethical principles (Principled conscience).** Kohlberg's final level of moral reasoning is based upon universal ethical principles and abstract reasoning. At this stage, people follow these internalized principles of justice, even if they conflict with laws and rules



## Discuss:

### **Turning theoretical principals into practices that will actually make a difference to people's lives**

- What are your thoughts on the theories we have looked at? Are they right/wrong, helpful/unhelpful, too simple/not simple enough – what is missing?
- Do any of these theories challenge or affirm your methods and hopes for the young people you work with?
- How can we use these theories to positively impact the way we work – please use relevant scenarios from your experience.
- Do any of these theories help us when considering our hope for our young people or what we should do to help their faith develop (With particular regard to age appropriateness)

# THE THEORIES: HOW FAITH DEVELOPS IN YOUNG PEOPLE

## Faith Development based on human development

A number of people have taken the theories of Piaget, Erikson and Kohlberg and used them as a foundation to chart or predict other areas of a persons development – notably faith! “If a person’s moral standards develop like this, then faith must develop like this”.

Two main pieces of work:

- John H. Westerhoff *Will Our Children Have Faith?* 1970
- James Fowler *Stages of Faith* 1981

# THE THEORIES: HOW FAITH DEVELOPS IN YOUNG PEOPLE

## John H. Westerhoff – Rings of Faith

Westerhoff identifies four 'rings' like the rings of a tree trunk. The young trunk has few rings; older trunks have many. The rings of faith can grow as a result of the right life experiences and in interacting with others and with God.



- **Experiencing faith**
- **Joining/belonging faith**
- **Searching/exploring faith**
- **Owning faith**

# THE THEORIES: HOW FAITH DEVELOPS IN YOUNG PEOPLE

## John H. Westerhoff

**Experiencing faith:** In early childhood faith development comes through the act of observation and reaction. Children observe faith in their interaction with adults and react to what they experience. At this stage, they are too young to consciously think about faith, and yet they demonstrate unwavering faith for those who love them.

Develop faith at this stage by providing experiences of trust, unconditional love, and acceptance.

**Joining/Belonging faith:** The Key to faith development for an early primary school age child is a sense of belonging. Children of this age have a keen sense of the order of things. They are also great “joiners.” They want to belong to a church that is bigger than their family and to clubs within the church.

Develop faith at this stage by providing a sense of the community, experiences of awe and wonder, and an atmosphere of authoritative acceptance (e.g. you are wanted by the authority figures in your church and you and your skills/gifts/personality are missed when you are not around)

# THE THEORIES: HOW FAITH DEVELOPS IN YOUNG PEOPLE

## John H. Westerhoff

**Searching faith:** Adolescents are questioning their experience of faith, the church, and what they have been taught, as well as the experiences of others. The Key element of the adolescent's searching faith is critical judgment. Advice/instruction from authorities is not enough. They want to examine all the information for themselves.

Develop faith by helping young people establish their own identity in God and by providing an atmosphere where it is ok to question and examine who they and what they believe through serious, gritty bible study, mission trips and service opportunities. Provide support and Godly advice as they go through the necessary turmoil of challenging their lifestyle, their appearance, all authority, and anything they identify with, in an effort to define themselves.

At this stage young people become critical of any explanations that cannot be supported by logic, good sense, and scientific inquiry and this is worth bearing in mind.

# THE THEORIES: HOW FAITH DEVELOPS IN YOUNG PEOPLE

## John H. Westerhoff

**Owning faith:** While the 'faith experiences' in pre-adolescence and childhood were real, eventually people reach a stage during adulthood when they must make their own decision to believe and personalise what they have been taught as a child. This person is now believing because they want to. The Keys to this lasting faith for the adult are witness and discipleship.

Faith develops through personal Bible study and prayer and through reflection and action based on experiences. Unless opportunities to witness by word and by lifestyle, and to step out and trust God are provided faith will stagnate in to religion.



# THE THEORIES: HOW FAITH DEVELOPS IN YOUNG PEOPLE

## James Fowler - Stages of Faith

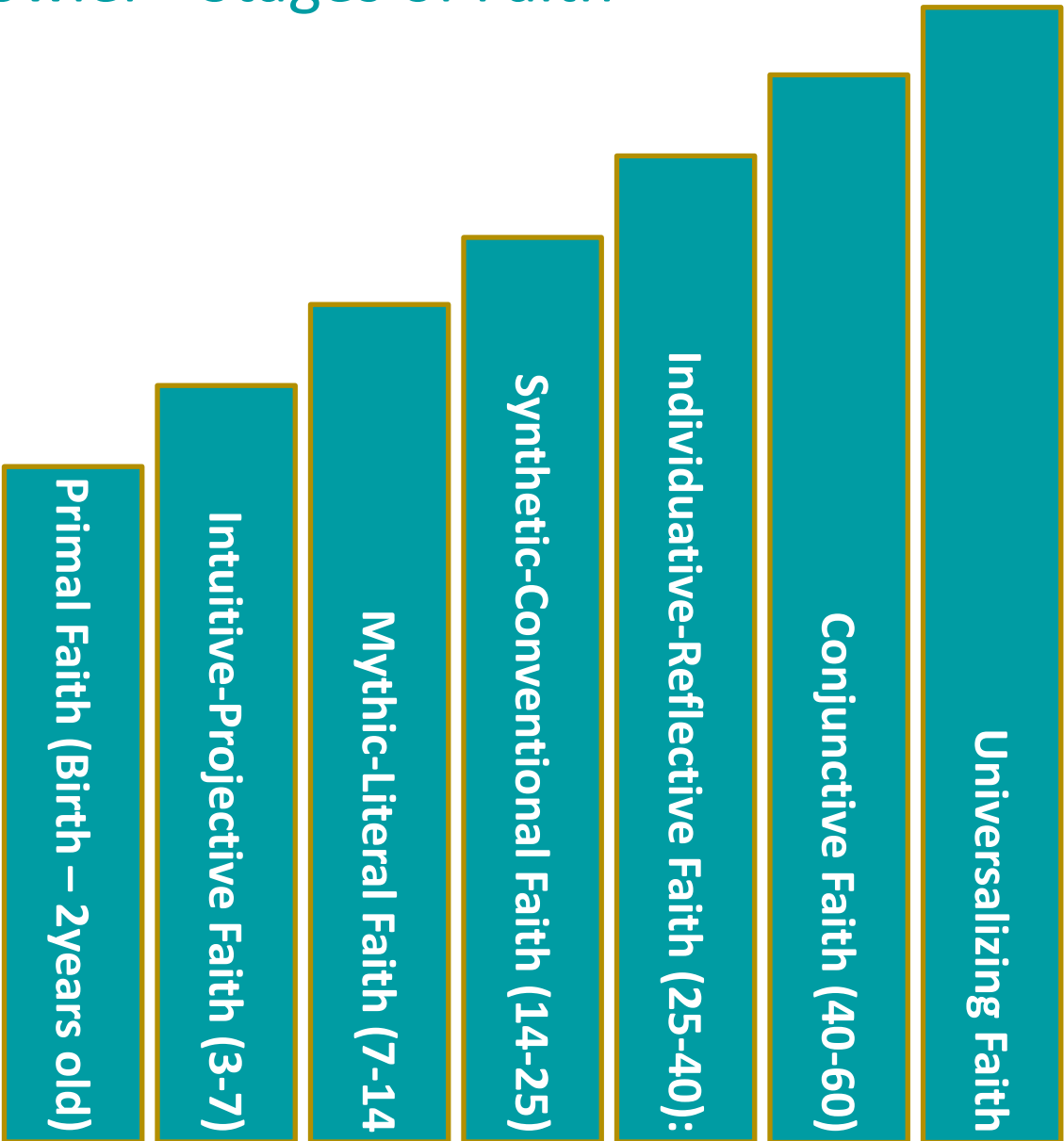
What does Fowler mean by faith...

"Faith may be characterised as an integral, centring process underlying the formation of beliefs, values and meanings that:

- (1) gives coherence and direction to persons' lives,
- (2) links them in shared trusts and loyalties with others,
- (3) grounds their personal stances and communal loyalties in the sense of relatedness to a larger frame of reference, and
- (4) enables them to face and deal with the conditions of human life, relying upon that which has the quality of ultimacy in their lives"

# THE THEORIES: HOW FAITH DEVELOPS IN YOUNG PEOPLE

James Fowler - Stages of Faith





# THE THEORIES: HOW FAITH DEVELOPS IN YOUNG PEOPLE

## James Fowler - Stages of Faith

Whereas Westerhoff suggested that faith developed in a series of concentric rings, James Fowler suggested that faith develops in a series of stages...

- **Primal Faith (Birth – 2years old):** Earliest faith is what enables us to undergo separation from parents without undue anxiety or fear of loss of self. Primal faith forms before there is language. It forms the basic rituals of care and interchange and mutuality. And, although it does not determine the course of our later faith, it lays the foundation on which later faith will build or that will have to be rebuilt in later faith.
- **Intuitive-Projective Faith (3-7):** The next stage of faith emerges in early childhood with the acquisition of language. Here imagination, stimulated by stories, gestures, and symbols and not yet controlled by logical thinking, combines with perception and feelings to create long-lasting faith images . . .Representations of God take conscious form in this period and draw, for good or ill, on children's experiences of their parents or other adults to whom they are emotional attached in the first years of life . . .when conversion experiences occur at later stages in ones' life, the images formed in this stage have to be reworked in some important ways.

# THE THEORIES: HOW FAITH DEVELOPS IN YOUNG PEOPLE

## James Fowler - Stages of Faith

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- **Mythic-Literal Faith (7-14):** Here concrete operational thinking, the developing ability to think logically, emerges to help us order the world with categories of causality, space, time and number. We can now sort out the real from the make-believe, the actual from fantasy. We can enter into the perspectives of others, and we become capable of capturing life and meanings in narrative and stories. **During the Mythic-Literal stage a child understands concrete concepts--things she/he can see or touch such as a policeman, lawyer or pastor but is unable to grasp abstract concepts (things you envision in your mind) such as law enforcement, law or theology (and yes, that includes God too).**
- **Synthetic-Conventional Faith (14-25):** The next stage characteristically begins to take form in early adolescence. The emergence of formal operational thinking [the ability to think abstractly] opens the way for reliance upon abstract ideas and concepts for making sense of one's world. The person can now reflect upon past experience and search them for meaning and pattern. At the same time, concerns about one's personal future--one's identity, one's work, career, or vocation--and one's personal relationships become important"

# THE THEORIES: HOW FAITH DEVELOPS IN YOUNG PEOPLE

## James Fowler - Stages of Faith

Whereas Westerhoff suggested that faith developed in a series of concentric rings, James Fowler suggested that faith develops in a series of stages...

- **Individuative-Reflective Faith (25-40):** In this next stage two important developments have to occur. Firstly we have to go through the turmoil of questioning, examining, and reclaiming the values and beliefs that we have formed to that point in our lives. They must become explicit commitments rather than blind commitments. Secondly we have to claim what Fowler calls an 'executive ego.' In the previous stage . . .one could say that a person's identity is largely shaped by her or his roles and relationships . . .In moving to the Individuative-Reflective stage, one has to face and answer such questions as, Who am I when I'm not defined by being my parents' son or daughter? Who am I when I'm not defined by the work I do? "Who is the 'I' that has those roles and relations but is not fully expressed by any one of them?"
- **Conjunctive Faith (40-60)** This stage involves the embrace and integration of opposites and polarities in one's life. It means realizing in one's late thirties, forties, or beyond that one is both young and old, and that youth and age are held together in the same life . . .It means coming to terms with the fact that we are both constructive people and, inadvertently destructive people. (Romans 7.14)

# THE THEORIES: HOW FAITH DEVELOPS IN YOUNG PEOPLE

## James Fowler - Stages of Faith

Whereas Westerhoff suggested that faith developed in a series of concentric rings, James Fowler suggested that faith develops in a series of stages...

- **Universalizing Faith:** "Beyond paradox and polarities, persons in the Universalizing Faith stage are grounded in a oneness with the power of being or God. Their visions and commitments seem to free them for a passionate yet detached spending of the self in love. Such persons are devoted to overcoming division, oppression, and violence, and live in effective anticipatory response to an inbreaking commonwealth of love and justice, the reality of an inbreaking kingdom of God."

This stage is exceedingly rare. The persons best described by it have become incarnators and actualisers of the spirit. They are "contagious" in the sense that they create zones of liberation from the social, political, economic and ideological shackles we place and endure on human futurity. Living with felt participation in a power that unifies and transforms the world, they are often experienced as subversive of the structures (including religious structures) by which we sustain our individual and corporate survival, security and significance. Many persons in this stage die at the hands of those whom they hope to change. The rare persons who may be described by this stage have a special grace that makes them seem more lucid, more simple, and yet somehow more fully human than the rest of us.. Life is both loved and held to loosely.



**Theories: How faith develops in young people**

**Vs**

**Practicalities: How to develop faith in young people**

## Discuss:

### **Turning theoretical principals into practices that will actually make a difference to people's lives**

- What are your thoughts on the theories we have looked at? Are they right/wrong, helpful/unhelpful, too simple/not simple enough – what is missing?
- Do any of these theories challenge or affirm your methods and hopes for the young people you work with?
- How can we use these theories to positively impact the way we work – please use relevant scenarios from your experience.
- What about those young people who don't fit these models or those young people who haven't grown up in a believing family?

# HOW CAN WE HELP YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP THEIR OWN FAITH

## The 4 B's

- **Bless:** From our earliest days we build trust relationships with those who 'bless' us. If we bless young people we may begin to earn their respect and trust.
- **Belong:** Young people desperately desire a sense of belonging, just look at gang culture for evidence. By providing opportunities to belong, or affirming what they already belong to, trust will continue to grow.

Experience and imitation is key here - If you display a boring religious walk with God your young people will believe in a boring religious God. If however, your life is governed by a vibrant faith in which you experience God then this will challenge their rationalism and need for tangibility as opposed to the transcendent.

# HOW CAN WE HELP YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP THEIR OWN FAITH

## The 4 B's to start

- **Believe:** Their trust in you, and your testimony, coupled with a sense of belonging and their experiences of God will lead to belief... But faith is more than a series of beliefs.
- **Behaviour:** Faith is belief in action – When a young person is encouraged to put their beliefs in to action faith develops.



# Prayer is key!!!

**You are not the only one hoping to influence young peoples commitment and faith!!!**

**“There is no neutral ground in the universe; every square inch, every split second, is claimed by God and counter-claimed by Satan” CS Lewis**



**Q&A and sharing  
your experiences**